THE
EUGENICS REVIEW

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Editor for the Society—Maurice Newfield.

"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

LEONARD DARWIN, 1850-1943

MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN, our beloved Honorary President, died at his home, Cripps's Corner, Forest Row, on Friday, March 26th. He was the fourth and last surviving son of Charles Darwin and Emma Wedgwood; and throughout his long life he displayed the intellectual activity and versatility, the high qualities of character, and the dedication to public service which have been the common heritage of his distinguished family.

Leonard Darwin was a soldier, scientist, member of parliament and author. The diversity of his interests and talents are reflected in the oddly unrelated titles of his books, which include, besides his fundamental contributions to eugenics, such subjects as municipal trading and bimetalism; in his appointments to the staff of the War Office Intelligence Department and as instructor at various staff colleges; in his service on scientific expeditions, including those concerned with the transit of Venus in 1874 and 1882; and in the distinction with which he filled the offices of president of the Royal Geographical Society, chairman of Bedford College for Women, and chairman of the Professional Classes War Relief Commission. Not even the characteristically modest record which he contributed to *Who's Who* could quite slur over these few moments in a life exceptionally rich in influence and achievement; or the fact that the University of Cambridge conferred upon him the well-earned honorary degree of Doctor of Science. A man totally devoid of ambition, as all who knew him testify, he could not altogether escape the fate of having greatness thrust upon him.

It was characteristic of Leonard Darwin that he had to be persuaded, against strong resistance, to succeed his cousin, Sir Francis Galton, as President of the *Eugenics Society*. He was too modest to acquiesce easily, but once convinced that in this position he could forward the cause of eugenics he plunged himself into the work, and in a critical period in the *Society's* fortunes, from 1911 to 1928, he formulated its policies and ideals, and by his writings and the influence of his personality did much to make them acceptable to an unsympathetic, misinformed and often highly suspicious public.

From the start he was prominent among those who believed that the objectives of the *Society* should be limited, at any rate in its difficult formative years, to matters on which all eugenists could agree: to the creation of a public opinion favourable to the promotion of fertility among those who could enrich the biological endowment of posterity and to its restriction, by sterilization or other means, among those whose contribution to posterity could be spared. This does not mean that he was indifferent to the influence of other than inborn genetical factors upon the physical and mental qualities of future generations; and indeed much of his Galton Lecture for 1929, the last occasion on which he addressed the

Society in person, was concerned with the eugenic evaluation of social changes. But some differentiation of function seemed to him essential, and he felt that the *Eugenics Society* would do better to devote itself exclusively to the study of man's heredity than to cumber itself with the problems of his personal and social environment, on which there were organizations that could speak with a more expert and certainly a more united voice.

"I suggest," he said in his Galton Lecture,* "that we should devote our energies almost exclusively to the propaganda side of the question; because I believe that the ways of science will always prove to be so far more pleasant than any attempt to force unpalatable truths on an unwilling public that, if both are admitted, the propaganda side of our work will not survive in the struggle for existence within the *Society*; just as, according to Gresham's Law, light money, being generally preferred by purchasers in times gone by, always tended to drive heavier coin out of circulation; if I may, for this purpose only, compare science to an inferior currency."

It is true that in recent years eugenists have given increasing attention to matters which Leonard Darwin and his generation preferred to leave alone; but who would say that in the conditions of their time theirs was not the wiser course? If the infant *Eugenics Society* has not emphasized the rôle of heredity as a determinant of phenotypical characters, the prevailing assumption that the differences between men reflected merely the differences in the circumstances of their lives might have continued to hold the field. Today, without risk of misunderstanding, we can stress the biologically selective influence of factors in our social and economic life; we can contemplate the problems of nature and nurture in explicit terms, not as antithetical factors but as variables within conditions that can be defined with increasing precision; but that we can do so is a debt we owe to those who, like Leonard Darwin, first made a social issue of the problem, even if they lacked, as indeed we still lack ourselves, all the material for its solution.

Eugenics is not an immutable doctrine and we should not esteem it a virtue if we pursued tomorrow the same policies as serve us today. While holding firmly to our ultimate purpose, which finds expression in our profound conviction that man by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature, we endeavour now, as in the past, to adapt our ideas and programme to the realities of a changing world. Leonard Darwin would have demanded nothing better of us. Always tolerant of intellectual differences he followed developments in the *Society's* outlook and activities as closely after his retirement as before; but he no longer took the initiative in influencing them and neither expected nor asked that they should accord with his own preferences. He had laid the foundations securely and was content that his successors should build on them in their own way. It is our duty and privilege to continue the work he so well began, setting ourselves the same task as that to which he devoted his life, and which he fittingly described as "the advancement of mankind in the future."

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Lord Horder, President of the *Eugenics Society*, writes:

The passing of Major Leonard Darwin in his ninety-third year impels some of us who were his associates in the work of the *Eugenics Society* to accord him an affectionate and dutiful Farewell. Affectionate, because to know the man, even a little, was to love him; dutiful, because he was to most of us the master and we were his pupils. A pilgrimage to his home in Sussex, even for a few hours, was always a stimulus and an inspiration to those who have tried to carry on his ideals: both physically and morally Leonard Darwin was the Sage: he not only looked wise, he *was* wise. His seventeen years' presidency of the *Society* set an example that is very difficult to follow and impossible to excel.

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*Eugenics Review, 1929, **21**, 11.

Sir Charles Galton Darwin, Vice-President of the *Eugenics Society*, writes:

Though my recollections of my uncle go back to my earliest days, it is rather the later times that I recall, especially many visits during the last twenty years to his house on Ashdown Forest. He retained to the very last a continuing interest in the theory of evolution, and of course in eugenics, and it always seemed to me that he combined very successfully this enthusiasm with a modesty which prevented him, as an old man, from intruding his views in such a way as to cause serious embarrassment to the later generations. He would write out, in his wonderfully firm handwriting, some ideas he might have, perhaps on a point in evolutionary theory, and would say, "I expect this ought to be torn up, but I would like to know what you think of it."

In many people of extreme old age there is a tendency for recent times to fade from the memory, so that the conversation perpetually harps back to earlier years. There was nothing of this in him. He kept his interest in current affairs to the very end, and in particular followed with interest the careers of all his family and relations. It was even rather hard to get him to talk of the days of his youth, and though I sometimes prompted him to speak of it, there were not many personal reminiscences of his father. He once described how Huxley, staying at Down, would try and shock the boys with anatomical stories. He used sometimes to talk of his military career, with reminiscences of Woolwich which included the name of Kitchener, and I remember him once saying that all the things he had done at the Staff College had had no connection with anything like war. He would also sometimes talk about his time in Parliament, recalling speeches of Gladstone and others.

Though he used to say that he had never had any scientific education, I should say he had all the outlook of a scientist, and that he would have accomplished even more than he in fact did, if he had not been obsessed by a modesty as to his own abilities which often made him fear to tread where others were quite willing to rush in.

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Mr. B. S. Bramwell, Chairman of Council, *Eugenics Society*, writes:

I first met Major Darwin shortly after the last war in our old quarters in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I had written an article which was published in the EUGENICS REVIEW and he asked me to join the Council. On the death of Mr. Howard Hazel, he accepted my offer to undertake the duties of Treasurer. Our finances depended very largely on an annual gift of £1,000 from a friend of his, who was always referred to as "the anonymous donor." This was Mr. Twitchin, and if it had not been for his personal confidence in Major Darwin, it is at least doubtful if the *Society* would have been the happy recipient of the Twitchin bequest. On his retiring from the Presidency, he felt that his successor must be relieved from much of the donkey work, if we were to obtain a man of eminence still actively engaged in his life's calling. He therefore suggested making a Chairman of Council. As the holder of this new office, I was indebted to him for much profound and far-reaching advice. His knowledge of the subject was immense; he had been in at the start and had undertaken work for Sir Francis Galton as far back as the time when he was a sapper subaltern. His knowledge of men was equally wide. One could hardly mention anybody without finding that he had sized up not only his intellectual stature but also his character and temperament, matters often of equal importance. Sanity and caution always marked his outlook. As against this, his family and sapper associations gave him an independence of thought not always to be found in more conventional circles. His larger work, *The Need for Eugenic Reform*, I think bears out these statements. His smaller book, *What is Eugenics?*, is an excellent introduction to the subject, and one Edinburgh Professor of Medicine presents a copy of it each year to all the members of his class. It would be idle to deny that his views have not always found favour in every class of the community, but his most severe critics are those whose grudge is really against Providence in having made men different and not equal. How much wiser was a remark

of Miss Jennie Lee in a recent broadcast that perhaps the rewards of intellect may be too great. Many of us feel that he did not receive the public recognition he deserved. True, he received a Doctorate of Science from Cambridge, but we should have liked to see him a Fellow of the Royal Society, as were his three brothers. Also, like them, the recipient of some State recognition. However, in spite of one puckish gleam of humour when Mr. Oscar Browning was made an O.B.E., these latter are generally highly conventional and dull.

It was delightful to travel down to Cripps's Corner and to seek advice from the fresh mind of the nonagenarian. Alas, no more. A life well spent.

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Dr. C. P. Blacker, General Secretary, *Eugenics Society*, writes:

When I became General Secretary of the *Society* twelve years ago, Major Leonard Darwin had ceased to take an active part in its affairs. That is to say that he never attended Council Meetings, or came to our Galton dinners. Nor did he wish to influence the policies of the *Society* despite the favourable change in its fortunes brought about by Mr. Twitchin's legacy which suddenly made us rich. Mr. Twitchin had been his friend and admirer, and it was entirely due to Leonard Darwin's influence that the *Society* came into the whole of his considerable estate.

Yet it is true to say that eugenics, together with the activities of the *Society*, remained Darwin's chief interest. Sir Bernard Mallet who, on his nomination, had succeeded him as President, was keenly aware that we owed everything to him. Darwin had gathered round himself, among the Honorary Officers and Council, a band of distinguished and loyal helpers; he had steered the *Society* through many difficult controversies; his leadership had been gentle, wise and firm. The world-wide respect which his name compelled was more than matched by the affectionate regard of those who sat at the meetings over which he presided. No one knew this better than Mallet, who bade me keep in close touch with him and to consult him over all problems and difficulties.

I followed his advice at the time and have continued to follow it since. My correspondence with Darwin was voluminous; and up till the war I used to visit him regularly every three months. I frequently took with me to see him persons who could supplement or correct my account of the *Society's* projects and activities, and my talks with him in his study at Cripps's Corner are among my happiest recollections. In the course of the last ten years, when he grew a beard, he came to have a striking resemblance to his father as he was depicted in his last portrait; and I seemed to detect an equally striking resemblance in character. It is difficult to describe this without fulsomeness. Leonard Darwin had a perfect courtesy for everyone, irrespective of age, station or attainments. This was revealed in personal contacts no less than in his allusions to people in conversation. He was completely devoid of the egotism and vanity which are sometimes disappointingly disclosed in eminent men. He retained till the very end an alertness of mind which continued to belie his self-disparaging belief that age and infirmity were impairing his judgment. But his most notable characteristic was his remarkable fairness and openness of mind, and it was in this that his resemblance to his father seemed to me most striking. My views on the genetic and social basis of eugenics, while in general conformity with his, differed in emphasis. I believed less than he did that eugenically desirable qualities were segregated in social classes, and this difference had implications affecting policy. We discussed these matters at length in letters and in conversation. His attentiveness and receptivity to arguments which were sometimes at variance with his outlook were an unfailing source of delight. It is not often that one meets people who genuinely regard controversy as a means of reaching truth. Leonard Darwin conveyed to one this approach more directly and convincingly than anyone I have ever met; and it was perhaps in this respect more than any other that he made one feel that, in his presence, one might be listening to his father. His views have been vigorously and sometimes

bitterly attacked. I have often wished that his detractors had a fraction of his genuinely scientific spirit, and of his integrity.

I think that I was the last person connected with the *Society* to see him. During my three years in the army, we maintained our correspondence. We exchanged several letters about Mr. Frederick Osborn's book, *Preface to Eugenics*, by which I had been much impressed. We exchanged views about the war, in whose favourable outcome he always believed, and about the policy of the *Society*. He firmly supported the decision of the executive committee to slow down activities and to refrain from dissipating our financial resources. One of the first things I did on leaving the army at the beginning of October 1942 was to pay him a visit at Cripps's Corner. The journey on October 12th presented war-time difficulties, and I had a ten-mile bicycle ride to and from Three Bridges. But we had an hour's talk in his study as of old. His kindness, his warmth, his courtesy, and the feeling of welcome he gave me were unchanged; and it was astonishing that, at the age of 93, his faculties were so alive. But the death of his wife had saddened him, and he now looked his years. As I said good-bye at the door of his house, I had a presentiment that this might be my last visit.

I have known very few men who inspired in equal measure such respect and affection as he; and I count my friendship with him as both a privilege and an education.

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Dr. R. A. Fisher, Galton Professor of Eugenics, University College, London, writes:

No more fitting memorial to Major Darwin's lifelong concern for eugenics could be found than in his masterly book, *The Need for Eugenic Reform*. To it speakers and writers on the subject will for long turn for wise counsel, and for a penetrating analysis of all aspects of eugenics, especially in its practical application.

It is one of the difficulties of the subject that eugenics exercises a potent attraction for cranks of various kinds. All the more valuable is the sober judgment, detached reasoning and well-weighed earnestness of this really great book.

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Mrs. S. Neville-Rolfe, Honorary Secretary to the British Social Hygiene Council, writes:

In the death of Major Darwin the country loses one of its wise men and a great gentleman.

As one who worked with him very closely over a long span of years (from 1909 to 1918) and since then has been privileged to maintain the ties of friendship, the loss is also personal. Major Darwin was a second father in his understanding, guidance and training of a willing amateur to public service. Looking back over the early years when, as President and Honorary Secretary of the then *Eugenics Education Society* respectively, we drew together a band of volunteers to bring the principles of eugenics into public consciousness, one realizes the care and patience, the strength and gentleness with which he drove his team of willing workers towards the objective.

I well remember in 1912, on the occasion of the First International Eugenics Congress, held at the London University, South Kensington, with Mr. Arthur Balfour making the speech of welcome at the opening dinner and *The Times* giving full reports of the sessions, with what satisfaction he was able to say, "we have now put eugenics in the public eye and made it respectable!"

It is a good example of his moral courage and intellectual integrity that when some of us wanted the *Eugenics Education Society* to raise the problems of venereal diseases—at that time an entirely taboo subject, and its damage to posterity unknown to the general public—Major Darwin, while seeing the danger to the infant *Eugenics Society*, recognized the importance of checking the preventable damage—although he did not consider the prevention of venereal diseases to be technically a matter of eugenics. Under his Presidency the first steps were taken from the *Eugenics Education Society* to secure the appointment of the Royal Commission; the majority of the commissioners were members of the then *Eugenics Education Society's* Council, and though he

personally had a great distaste for the subject, Major Darwin presided over the first meeting at which the provisional executive of the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases was appointed and remained for a number of years its Honorary Treasurer.

The kindly side of his character took greater pleasure in another endeavour in which he, Sir Theodore Chambers and I worked together to give practical effect to a positive aspect of eugenics. At the outbreak of the last war, a number of the professional classes, a socially selected group of a proved standard of intelligence, were in acute economic difficulties. To bridge the war period through maintaining continuity in education, through maternity accommodation and assistance and in many other ways—as Chairman of the Professional Classes War Relief Council he guided an early experiment in social welfare related to social biology.

Intellectual integrity, courtesy and kindliness are to my mind the characteristics that stand out in memories of Major Darwin.

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Mrs. C. B. S. Hodson, Honorary Secretary to the International Human Heredity Committee, 1930-9, writes:

On learning the news of Major Darwin's passing, I thought back to the period when I was working under him, and the time before. There may never be another opportunity given me to express gratitude for that time, and this can best be done in the simple statement of intimate facts. Being one of those happy people whose occupation is concerned with their chief aspirations, I know that I owe this mainly to two men: first Sir Edward Poulton, who made it possible for me, late in college days, to begin studies in science, and then to Major Darwin (to whom Sir Edward "handed me on" as it were), who led me to concentration on human biology, and brought my mental devotion to evolution into proper relation to problems of society.

There will be in the U.S.A. a keen sense of the loss of a leader. Were it not war-time, one would also hear many tributes to his friendship and wise captaincy from Europe, and not least from our enemies' country. Here at home it is not generally realized how widespread and penetrating was his influence outside this country.

Brevity forbids even a bare outline of the growth of the International Federation of Eugenics (earlier the International Eugenics Commission) which brought Major Darwin into relations with America and the Continent over a long period, of which the beginnings go back to that dim age "before the last war." That can be learned from records. His influence, and the directions it took, are less easily recognized from that history; nor can one clearly disentangle in the position at any given moment how much is due to his guidance, and how much to other factors in development. These are the things one would like to see recorded.

Throughout Western Civilization Charles Darwin was a name to conjure with, and his son was accepted with a great respect before he was known personally. Major Darwin treasured affectionately what was a tribute to his father, but most cleverly evaded any reflected glory falling on himself. The result gave him contacts entirely personal; he became known and respected for himself; respect grew into affection on the part of those who had frequent opportunities of seeing him, and thus his views prevailed—often against considerable potential resistance.

Major Darwin had no illusions about the many differences distinguishing countries and peoples; and he realized how much minute points of custom and outlook dominate the emotional attitudes of their nationals. Thus he never fell into the mistaken attempt to rationalize, still less to ignore, these potential points of division. For all these national (or local) features, by courteous recognition, he showed a kind of "international respect," so that the suspicion of British national superiority could not arise. It may be added that this same awareness of differences, applied to personal idiosyncrasies as part of the human make-up (coupled with the respect which knowledge of the hereditary inevitableness

thereof entails), made his personal relations entirely devoid of snobbery. The celebrity meeting him, lost his feeling of reliance on a great name, and became a man ; the humble and unknown individual felt the compliment of being accepted as of interest in and for himself and reacted with new confidence ; insincerity could not long persist in this atmosphere, indeed that was the one quality which evoked laughter or scorn.

It was not alone these personal characteristics which brought about a united federation of the previously warring nations, all still sore, or full of inimical feelings, sooner than one first dared to hope. There was wise policy in each detail of the common business. Those who were being gently led, rarely suspected the inflexible purpose patiently at work through each detail of election to membership, each conference programme, even in the selection of the social entertainments which played their part in the international intercourse. Here, generosity in money matters played its part, that is at an angle where it often remained hidden, and could in no way interfere with the desirable financial independence of the Federation.

One point of far-seeing policy has in the event had special importance, and it was a policy that often caused criticism—namely, that the group should never discuss practical eugenic measures. Papers and work were strictly limited to theory, scientific aspects of problems, and research. It is in the realm of practical measures that the national emotional outlook and prejudice play the strongest part. Insuperable divisions would rapidly have wrecked any true international collaboration had these ever been mooted ; research, on the other hand, proved a fruitful soil for joint work, and it is the side of the Federation's life which still bears fruit, under other dress, in more than one direction.

Here may be mentioned the outstanding aspect of eugenic science constantly reiterated by our leader : this was selection, which was in Darwinian evolution theory the instrument playing on the material of variation and heredity. A search for the factors at work in human selection was a goal steadily kept in view, so that practical measures of social selection might eventually be wisely chosen and applied. Natural selection seems to be a touchstone of any thinker's power of reasoning ; social selection has proved to be an indicator of the individual scientist's courage and independence of thought. It is proof (if proof were needed) of his large measure of this quality, combined with scrupulous honesty.

Major Darwin's lectures and addresses were no more " popular " abroad than at home ; his conscientious care for accuracy in detail of fact and language prevented that lightness which makes a speech easy for the hearers. Long preparation went to making the fullest use of every chance of teaching. When, however, some extemporary unprepared occasion arose, humour, pleasantness and ease were never lacking, while the habitual sincerity made complimentary remarks and " votes of thanks " from him ring true in a way that made of these trivialities amongst his foreign friends coins of value ; it was a *largesse* that did much to unify a group of singular variety.

I hope he knew to the end how much of his work persisted—though so much of what he would have wished to see come about awaits posterity, perhaps our grandchildren ? His modesty would prevent his desiring, much less claiming, his real share in the advances of the knowledge of the biological side of Man's life, whereby alone human evolution can escape another period of frustration ; his singular wise patience knew no pessimism, focussing on the vision ahead ; when his part was played he could wait content. I think he trusted " those that come after " : it will take all our powers to be worthy of that trust.

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The Hon. Mrs. Grant Duff writes :

Major Leonard Darwin was President of the *Eugenics Society* for nearly twenty years, and no one was ever more delightful to work with. He combined the qualities of efficiency with human kindness and understanding to a rare degree, and it was this combination which made serving under him a real privilege. He was whole-heartedly devoted to the cause of what in America is called

" human-betterment," and we call eugenics. He never spared himself in his efforts to make the laws of human heredity understood by those they so deeply concern, not only in his own country but throughout the world, for no one knew better than he did that these questions concern all humanity. His example was an inspiration and working with him an education which not only caused others to give of their best unstintingly and untiringly, but made their efforts a true happiness.

When he retired to the country he was deeply missed ; but his help and encouragement were still always accessible, both to correspondents and to all who went to Forest Row to visit him. He kept his clear faculties to the end of his ninety-three years, and now his loss is irreparable.

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Lady Chambers writes :

It is with pleasure that I shall always remember the years I served under Major Darwin with the *Eugenics Education Society* and the happy days when everyone was filled with enthusiasm and the single-hearted desire to educate the general public to understand the import of the laws of heredity.

Major Darwin was our loved President and for seventeen years he guided us all. Mental honesty was an outstanding feature of his life and, therefore, he always gave a fair hearing to all who served under him. I can never remember him other than courteous, no matter whether he agreed with the views being expressed or not. His patience and clear exposition often converted his opponents.

When the last war broke out and Mrs. Neville-Rolfe (then Mrs. Gotto) and Sir Theodore Chambers started the Professional Classes War Relief Council and were established in Princes Gate (lent to them by Mrs. Pierpont Morgan), Major Darwin willingly accepted the invitation to become Chairman of the Council, and for some years he gave his wise and sympathetic help to the work. He shared the views of the founders as to the eugenic value of the project, designed to encourage parenthood and to give help to those carrying good stock through the tribulations of the war period.

I cannot finish my small tribute to his memory without a mention of his quiet sense of humour, which often gave us much enjoyment. I shall always be thankful that I knew him and grateful for all he taught me.